

## IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST – RESEARCHING & PROMOTING NARROW GAUGE RAILWAYS

### A.C. LYNN ZELMER

This workshop draws on my experiences over the last 18 years building a research collection of documents, plans, photographs and books on sugar cane railways, and on my work with the CaneSIG and QldRailHeritage.com web sites.

Participants will have an opportunity to examine a variety of narrow gauge (NG) railway resources useful for the modeller and to discuss issues relating to researching and promoting narrow gauge railways “in the public interest”.

#### Presenter’s Background

I am a retired university lecturer who at various times has been employed as a teacher, photographer,

filmmaker, educational TV producer, media consultant and multimedia lecturer. My railway/modelling interests have focussed on NG and branch line operations, including Alberta’s coal mining lines, and the logging railways and geared locomotives of Vancouver Island.

The image below, for example, was copied in the 1970s when I was developing a resource kit for schools on coal mining in Alberta. Regrettably, I was diverted by income generating tasks and only recently packaged some of the materials for use by modellers. The 16 mm movie film shot for this project was deposited with the Provincial Archives of Alberta in the late 1980s and several hundred still images were finally deposited there recently.



Mountain Park, Alberta 1913, narrow gauge horse-drawn mine railway. Luscar Ltd roll 1:09, Lynn Zelmer collection

Museums, libraries and archives all accept personal collections of photographs but they seldom have a policy of actively soliciting such materials. All too often significant photo collections are dumped on the “tip” following the death of the photographer. The image above was copied in 1972 from a photo album maintained by a mining company official. The albums may or may not have been retained by the company and/or deposited in a public archive, but the copy negatives were deposited with the Provincial Archives of Alberta by the author in 2006.



Train 383, engine 2143, leaving Leyland for Luscar (passenger: 1 express, 2 coach and caboose), 28 January 1939

Many standard gauge branch lines of North America have the same charm as their better-known narrow gauge cousins. The Alberta Coal Branch only thrived for a few years before its towns were abandoned, leaving the serious modeller with a major task finding enough information to create an authentic model railway. Reverend Powell, now deceased, resided in the area for several years. Thankfully some of his photographs have survived and been deposited with the Provincial Archives of Alberta. Photo: CD Powell 1939, Lynn Zelmer Collection.



Prints, slides, negatives and films deteriorate over time, especially in tropical heat and humidity (above left). While digital technologies allow us to easily “clean up” the scanned image (above right), it is important that information is not lost when this is done. In this image of “Frenchy” (0-4-0T Decauville b/n 246) abandoned at Qunaba Mill, the background tank, mill stacks, and the foreground section of portable track all potentially provide useful details. The photographer is now deceased, but his images have been privately preserved and low-resolution copies are being made available on the CaneSIG web site. Photo: date unknown, John Browning Collection.

Over the last 18 years I've been collecting materials on sugar cane railways in Queensland and around the world. CaneSIG, the sugar cane railway modellers special interest group, provides an outlet for that work, as does my cane railway modelling (HOn30, On30 and SM32).

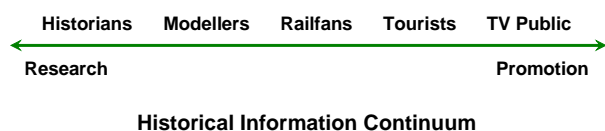
My involvement with Queensland's cane railways actually began before I moved to Australia early in 1989. My wife moved to Rockhampton mid-1998 and soon queried me about the tramline crossings she had seen on the Bruce Highway. Soon after my arrival I purchased maps, began travelling to the cane growing areas, and started my photo collection. Eventually I met several other cane railway modellers, visited

museums and archives with cane railway holdings, began sharing my findings with other modellers, and even worked on several cane railway research projects.

Post retirement I've also tried to complete and/or revise several earlier projects, and have scanned slides, negatives and related documents to ensure that more of my collection, such as the Alberta Coal Branch materials, is available via [www.zelmeroz.com](http://www.zelmeroz.com).

## Historians, Modellers, Railfans & Tourists

I suppose some will question the idea that historians, modellers, railfans and tourists engage in the same activities. However, I see them as points on a continuum in terms of the amount of detail they need to satisfy their interests. While the historian expresses his knowledge through research articles, the modeller expresses his in model form, and the modeller is a railfan/tourist while visiting areas of potential modelling interest.



The NG modeller makes a decision to specialise and to be more prototypically oriented than the general modeller. This doesn't mean that the NG modeller necessarily follows only one specific prototype. My "Capricorn Sugar" railway is also based on real world information, current and historical; it's just that I express it through a fictitious prototype. Likewise, there is little difference in the information required for modelling a modern railway versus one set in a historical context, only the information sources may be different.

For a well-known railway, such a Colorado NG mining railway, you can find an extensive collection of material from almost every era of its operation. Typically this includes preserved equipment, museums, archives, railfan and historical groups, magazine articles and books, formation maps, building and equipment plans, photograph collections and films/videos.

Many NG lines were built to serve a single resource or industrial company. The management of the railway and/or the industry it served may have discouraged visitors for safety reasons or the railway may have operated in an isolated area. Then again, the people working for both the railway and the industry may have been fairly itinerant, or illiterate (or both), and were discouraged from photographing or otherwise documenting the railway and its operation. Sometimes, as with much of the sugar industry, there was little incentive, or funds, for any record-keeping other than that required by the bank or government authorities. As a result there may be very little documentary record of the railway's operation.

The tourist and the railfan are not as concerned with the documentary evidence as the modeller and historian. Typically they want basic information about the railway, but they are then quite willing to amble down an old formation looking for the remains of a building or a bridge to photograph. The modeller may also fill a small sack with rocks, soil or other materials from the area to use as ballast or ground cover on a model of the area.

Incidentally, most cane railways are narrow gauge, as are Queensland's mainline railway operations, but the general public doesn't understand (or care) about narrow versus standard gauge or the implications of different gauges. Thus, [QldRailHeritage.com](http://QldRailHeritage.com) (see below) doesn't confuse people by trying to explain the difference. For me it's *in the public interest* to simply promote Queensland's railways and rail heritage.

## Formal Collections: Museums, Libraries & Archives

Library collections start with books and journals, archives with government and corporate records and museums with historical artefacts. Sooner or later, though, through legislative changes, the interest of an individual staff member or through an estate deposit, many institutions expand beyond their original remit so that the type and content of the collection changes. For example, you wouldn't necessarily think of a labour relations archive as a source of railway photos, but the Noel Butlin Archive Centre at the Australian National University also holds many of CSR's early corporate records for Australia and Fiji.

National and state institutions have formal policies on access to their collections, purchasing copies of photos and documents etc. Charges for such copies are generally reasonable for private research purposes, with explicit permission and an additional fee required for display or publication. Access to university, school, private/corporate and municipal collections is likely to be much more idiosyncratic and may require the intervention of someone known to the institution.

Many rail heritage museums and organisations also have a limited collection of library and archive materials, often donated by relatives of deceased supporters or purchased for a circulating collection. Unless the collection is the responsibility of someone with "library" training the collection is often poorly maintained and lacks coherence.

Similarly, many local museums and enthusiasts' groups either do not have an acquisition and maintenance policy or the current Board/members ignore the policies. This is often the result of an understandable desire to "save everything" connected with an industry or railway and/or an equally-understandable priority given to operating trains rather than the museum.



ANGRMS is located in a timber/dairy region some distance from Queensland's cane fields. The HO30 dioramas and accompanying photo display help "interpret" the locomotives and other museum artefacts, most of which came from the sugar industry. Viewers suggest that O scale or larger dioramas would be preferable, regardless of the space required.



A Krauss locomotive operated at the Mt Bauple sugar mill from 1912 to 1951. However, neither the original locomotive nor a reasonable substitute was available when the museum's static loco display was being set up. The 1907 Fowler, shown above, came from the nearby Isis Mill and has been cosmetically "restored" (similar cab outline) to resemble the original Krauss.



## The Internet, Informal & Individual Collections

Perhaps the best analogy for the Internet is a scrapbook or photo album containing items of significance to its owner. The contents are as complete as the owner's interest and resources allow, but frequently lack captions/explanations and dates, with source and date information missing even from newspaper clippings.

For many this lack of provenance doesn't matter. A freelance modeller collecting data on a particular locomotive or piece of rolling stock, for example, may not need to know where, or even when, a photograph was taken for it to be useful in modelling.

A museum or library may not willingly accept such materials into its collection, but a well-documented scrapbook or photo album can still be a significant timesaver for the serious modeller or historian. It's far easier to scan a scrapbook created by an interested participant than to sift through the back issues of a newspaper collection for articles on a specific topic.

The Internet raises concerns over privacy, intellectual property and security. Changing data formats and media failure also raise doubts about the long-term reliability of digital data.

CaneSIG is a virtual special interest group (SIG) – and the only virtual SIG affiliated with the National Model Railroad Association (NMRA) – for modellers of sugar cane railways. As the name implies, it conducts all of its activities online. The web site was organised following the Fourth Australian Narrow Gauge Convention in Brisbane (April 1999) to help popularise sugar cane railway modelling, and the site now provides access to more than 3000 cane railway and model images and drawings, plus modelling notes and industry news. CaneSIG's material comes from individual modellers in four or five different countries. Indexed by the major search engines, viewers come from all over the world.

QldRailHeritage.com was created more recently to provide tourists, railfans and modellers with a single point-of-access to Queensland's rail-oriented information. The site provides web hosting for several Queensland museums, but most of the information and photographs have been created by the author as many rail-oriented attractions/activities do not seem to understand the need for an up-to-date public presence. The site is also indexed by the major search engines, the result of participating in non-commercial, web-ring online marketing.

A purely narrow gauge modelling focus, in support of the Narrow Gauge SIG, is the purpose [www.ZelmerOz.com/ngrail/](http://www.ZelmerOz.com/ngrail/).

# CaneSIG

The Cane Railway (Tramline) Modelling Special Interest Group

CaneSIG Home Page

- Modelling
- Image Collection
- Industry
- Resources
- What is CaneSIG?

A C Lynn Zelmer, Coordinator -- Fax: +61 7 4936 2393 -- E-mail: [lynn@zelmeroz.com](mailto:lynn@zelmeroz.com)  
Above: Moreton Mill loco depot prior to the closure of the mill late 2003.

CaneSIG is a free resource for modellers of the world's sugar cane railways. While it is an [NMRA](#)-affiliated Special Interest Group (SIG), membership is not required to participate or download resources. Please contact the Coordinator if you have resources that you would like to share.

- **John Browning Collection**, [198 photos](#) of Queensland cane railways from the 1960s onwards.
- **8th Australian Narrow Gauge Convention**, Melbourne, Victoria - Easter weekend (6-8 April) 2007 - Carwatha College, Noble Park North (a south-eastern suburb of Melbourne). Further convention [details](#). NMRA [narrow gauge SIG](#).
- **High resolution versions** of Jim Fainges scale drawings are now available.
- **Cyclone Larry** (20/03/06) and its [effects](#) (392 Kb pdf file) from *The Australian* newspaper reports.



Cane-enabled: The Mourilyan sugar plant, south of Innisfail, was damaged by Cyclone Larry

Picture: Lyndon Mechielsen

## Cyclone won't sweeten sugar prices

Sugar production

CYCLONE damage to sugar production in Australia, the world's third-biggest exporter, won't be enough to raise global sugar prices, Macquarie Bank predicts.

Australia's 4 million tonnes of exports represented about 10 per cent of the global export market, Macquarie analysts Andrew Dale, John Purtell and Andrew

LScott said in a report yesterday. A reduction in the crop would have a "relatively small" impact, the analysts said.

Raw sugar futures have gained 3.5 per cent in New York since the cyclone hit north Queensland on Monday.

Australia's sugar output might be cut by 150,000 to 250,000 tonnes, the US Department of Agriculture said yesterday.

Australia was forecast to produce 5.2 million tonnes in the year ending June 30, 2007.

"A hypothetical 20 per cent, or 1 million tonne, reduction in the Australian crop would equate to a relatively small 2.5 per cent impact on the global market," the Macquarie analysts said in the report.

Production losses would be further limited if cane crops that were knocked

down by the cyclone's winds kept growing in their flattened state.

This growth, known as lodging, would allow the crop to mature and be harvested with a reduced yield.

Sugar prices have jumped 95 per cent in the past year as Brazil, the world's biggest producer, converted more of its crop to ethanol production.

Bloomberg

Most daily newspapers are now available on the Internet, although many now only let you view headlines for free, with full-text articles (and illustrations) and back issues only available for a fee or by subscription. Typically newspapers and other publications aggressively protect their intellectual property rights and may frown on a rail museum or railfan group reproducing news articles in a newsletter.

Publications such as LRRSA's Light Railways solve this problem by printing short, referenced excerpts from newspaper, radio and television items, plus

extracts from on-line discussion groups where the participants are aware their contributions may be used for publication.

Intellectual property rights involving materials posted on-line are still evolving. It's quite ironic that a historian can quote extensively from a newspaper or other publication in a thesis or journal article (with proper referencing), but posting the newspaper article above on a web site such as CaneSIG, even with full referencing, could be problematic.

# CaneSIG

**The Cane Railway  
(Tramline)  
Modelling Special  
Interest Group**

[CaneSIG Home Page](#)

Modelling ▾


Image Collection ▾

Industry ▾


Resources ▾

What is CaneSIG? ▾

- Atherton Tablelands
- Mossman Mill
- Hambledon Mill
- Mulgrave Mill
- Babinda Mill
- Goondi Mill
- South Johnstone Mill
- Mourilyan Mill
- Tully Mill
- Macknade Mill
- Victoria Mill
- Kalar
- Invicta Mill
- Pioneer Mill, Bl
- Inkerman Mill, Ho
- Proserp
- Farle
- Cattle Creek Mill, Finch
- Pleysto
- Mar
- Racecourse Mill, N
- North E
- Plane Creek Mill,
- Farnborough Mill, Ye
- Fairyme
- Binge
- Quna
- Millag
- Isis Cent
- Maryborough Sugar F
- Moreton Mill, Na
- WH Heck & Sons, Rock
- Condong Mill
- Broadwater Mill
- Harwood Mill
- Ord River M



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Above: Wallaville Mill panorama, 2002.

## Australian Cane Mills and Their Railways

Over the years there have likely been several hundred mills in Queensland alone if one counts both 'juice' and regular mills. Some lasted a few months, others are still going strong after more than a century of service to their communities.


As well, there are bulk sugar terminals at Cairns, Mourilyan, Lucinda, Townsville, Mackay, Bundaberg and Brisbane to transport bulk sugar to refineries in the capital cities and overseas.

The list at the left includes the major mills in Queensland and NSW, several of which are no longer in existence. Most of the mills still have



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- Victoria Mill
- Kalar
- Invicta Mill
- Pioneer Mill, Bl
- Inkerman Mill, Ho
- Proserp
- Farle
- Cattle Creek Mill, Finch
- Pleysto
- Mar
- Racecourse Mill, N
- North E
- Plane Creek Mill,
- Farnborough Mill, Ye
- Fairyme
- Binge
- Quna
- Millag
- Isis Cent
- Maryborough Sugar F
- Moreton Mill, Na
- WH Heck & Sons, Rock
- Condong Mill
- Broadwater Mill
- Harwood Mill
- Ord River M



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## QldRailHeritage.com

Providing a single point-of-access to Queensland's rail heritage institutions: rail-oriented museums, heritage rail tours, railfan groups, model railways, etc.

Heritage Railways/Tours ▾

Museums with a Rail Focus ▾


Rail-Oriented Points of Interest ▾


Libraries/Archives/Organisations

- Introduction
- Queensland
  - Assn of Tourist Rlys - Qld
  - CQ Comb. Rail Groups Network
  - CQU Capricornia Collection
  - CQU Centre for Rly Engineering
  - John Oxley Library, Qld
- Australia
  - Butlin Archives, Canberra
- Operation/Safety
  - Health Assessment
  - Qld Transport - Rail Safety

work with your browser; **Tourist Zones:** Qld - Central Qld - Sunshine Coast & Bundaberg - Brisbane & SE Qld - Outside Qld Groupings: Libraries & Archives - Railfans & Modellers - Points of Interest - Vale Moreton Mill - Twenty-first Century Rail - Operation/Safety (incl health assessment) - Assn Tourist Rlys Qld - QR Heritage Volunteers - CQ CRG Network

- [AlbumQuery](#) image collection. Opens in a new window, close it to return to this page.
- [Coming Events](#)
- [Vale Moreton Mill](#)
- [Felin Hen update](#) (pdf)
- [QR 140th Anniversary Train photos](#)
- [Colouring pages for children](#)
- [Award winning site \(Central Qld Combined Rail Groups Network\).](#)





For QR's rail services link to [Queensland Rail](#).

Sample pages from [www.zelmeroz.com/canesig](http://www.zelmeroz.com/canesig) and [qldrailheritage.com](http://qldrailheritage.com)

Indexing by major search engines is essential for small organisations and is often accomplished through "web rings", a form of non-commercial on-line marketing. Finding items within any site is not always easy, as site organisation reflects the developer's priorities, not necessarily the sites' needs. Sites must be updated regularly, and they require regular maintenance and redesign.



## Central Queensland Combined Rail Groups Network

Our rail heritage museums, tours and related groups have organised a number of new bodies for insurance, health and safety, training, lobbying and promotion. The Central Queensland group is an informal, semi-social network that rotates quarterly meetings around member museums from Gympie to Mackay. QldRailHeritage.com operates as the network's web site.

Many of the research repositories and preservation organisations that NG modellers depend on for information are public, often municipal, bodies and are subject to all of the pressures and changing priorities that such bodies represent.

Museums such as Archer Park Steam Tram and Railway Museum, for example, depend on volunteers for routine maintenance, daily operations and restoration. They must also balance the conflicting demands of a municipal administration which would like to see the Museum as a profit centre, rather than a drain on the public purse. A regular, albeit small, income from the entry fee for tour groups and casual visitors is balanced by the several hundred visitors who come on the roughly quarterly "Carriage Day Capers", where entry is by gold coin donation.

The Association of Tourist Railways Queensland (ATQR) is part of the national network that was

formed during the public liability insurance difficulties several years ago. It represents members on state and national bodies and assists with accreditation, health and safety, training and other issues.

So what of NG modellers, their home and club layouts, and personal collections?

While our home layouts may never be seen by more than a few friends and neighbours, we do depend upon the historical and other resources available within the wider community so that we can build credible models.

Our club layouts and exhibition displays have a broader reach, but are often statements of personal interest, rather than deliberately interpreting and promoting railways amongst the community. And like the various rail heritage groups, we often fail to attract younger members to carry on as current members age.



Lincoln Driver's Wallville HOn2.5 layout gives a smooth-running display of cane train operations at the 2005 Brisbane Train Show. We need better ideas about encouraging viewers to become modellers and creating display/handout materials to put the models in context. Last year's Wallville article in *Narrow Gauge Downunder* is a start, but the audience is restricted.

A. C. Lynn Zelmer

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